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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

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MM Docket No. 91-221
Comments Re: NOTICE OF INQUIRY
Deadline for submission 12/19/91

To Whom It May Concern:

In response to the notice of inquiry by the FCC and the announcement by the free access major television networks intention to apply for greater involvement in the cable and video markets, I Silvia Stagg, residing at 910 Cypress Station Road Apt. 1611, Houston Texas 77090 hereby offer the following reply and suggestions concerning FCC policy(ies) and rules.

The major free access television networks are requesting that the FCC and perhaps other governmental bodies relax their rules and policies to allow greater participation in the cable and video markets due to their assertions that as a result of the cable and video markets they have been losing a substantial portion of their viewing public hence affecting their ability to compete and maintain a sound profit margin. This is an incorrect argument.

CONSEQUENCES TO CURRENT NETWORK PROGRAMMING

- 1) The only logical and realistic answer why any business loses its competitive edge especially when they have for the most part enjoyed a historical monopoly in an enormous market is due to the fact that they have failed to offer a competitive product which keeps up with the public's interests and needs as society develops. This problem is very widespread in American business today and it challenges every business to

keep an eye on the needs of its consumers or else the consumers will turn to other more satisfying alternatives even if they are forced to pay extra for that particular service or product. Obviously, the viewing public has turned away from the major television networks due to the lack of quality and satisfaction of the major television networks programming by choosing to 'shop' elsewhere for its news, educational and entertainment needs which have been provided for in large part by the diversity of the cable and video industry. The placing of blame by the major television networks that the creation of new markets such as cable and video which offer alternative news, educational and entertainment programming is to avoid the responsibility that they have toward the public and their own failure to change with the times and offer more creative, and innovative, uncensored, unbiased, non sexist/racist and informative programming.

2. The major networks through their 30 second sound bites, short interviews, photo ops, restriction of discussing issues, restricting information, strong emphasis on sensationalism, media bias, restrictive reporting of the news in such a manner which can only be termed as censorship, bias, or propaganda, has the result however subtly to brainwash, to frustrate and infuriate the viewing public, and causes the viewing public to get a skewed perspective in seeing issues the way they see them, to react the way they want the viewing public to react, thereby manufacturing public opinion, confusion and apathy

directly interfering with the public's right to know, hence limiting the public's options concerning decisions on important issues in their lives, their constitutional rights and political choices such as to whom to vote for in local and national elections, and what types of domestic and foreign policies to support or not support and why. The government by allowing this situation to exist and the media for perpetuating such programming have come to the wrong conclusion that they and not the public know what is best for the viewing and voting public and what they should or have a right to know or not to know. The major networks are promoting an unintelligent and polarized society, and with such a racially, politically, religiously and socio-economically diverse society such as ours this is especially dangerous to the public's welfare.

PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY

3. The foremost important obligation of all major television networks, public TV, cable (and even video to some extent) should always be respectful of the public's welfare and their right to know. The major network's have failed miserably in this regard and due to improved technology which arises out of a need for new and improved methods of mass communication by the public for more accurate, uncensored, unbiased and complete information and entertainment programming will continue to challenge all communication industries to continually improve their products and programming or face economic difficulties.

The network giant's approach supports a quantitative product instead of a qualitative product and this is not in the public's best interest. The major free access networks have repeatedly over the years been indifferent to public protests and has cancelled many entertainment program series not because of their lack of qualitative and creative content (many cancelled series have either been nominated or won television EMMY awards) but because according to the Nielson ratings not enough people were watching. This fast food mentality toward news and entertainment programming must end if the major networks are to retain the viewer's interest. The major network's emphasis again is on quantity and not quality contrary to cable which is often topic specific and catering to small and large groups of audiences on various topics of news, educational and entertainment programming which makes cable and video so competitive and gives the public what it has been craving and was previously denied by the major free access networks. This diversity and entrepreneurial atmosphere must not be stifled by the network giants being allowed greater access and control in a communications environment which to date has no minority or female ownership. The cable and video market is perhaps the only market where the middle class of any race or sex can still hope to participate in. The Video markets offer franchises which are quite popular and show great promise. The cable networks relationship with the viewing public

especially Turner Communications has for the most part been a very interactive relationship with its viewers and is acutely aware of their continual need to change and improve their programming. Considering the history of the poor business practices of the major networks there are no signs that they will change their indifference to the voting and viewing public's needs and concerns and so a larger share of the pie will not necessarily mean more profit, but will take away room for others to grow and participate in creating a hostile environment. If the major networks would change their programming to be more competitive their market would increase, their advertisers would return or be replaced and it may also be necessary to trim the fat and waste in their business. If they fail to reform their business practices then I would argue that it is in the best interest of the public for them to be allowed to fail. The remaining personnel would be absorbed in the emerging new markets of cable and video. The viewing and voting public does not owe the major networks a monopoly and certainly not even a living nor a larger share of the pie if they cannot keep censorship and media bias and exploitation of the racial and sexual problems and issues out of their programming. The public's welfare and the public's right to know supersede the major network's first amendment argument.

NEWS ELECTION SERVICE MONOPOLY

4. An alarming trend since the creation of the News Election Service (aka NES) during the Kennedy administration formed by the major networks CBS, NBC, ABC, as well as UPI, AP (and now unfortunately Turner Communications PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED IT'S INTENDED involvement with NES) is the monopoly and censorship in not reporting 3rd party national percentage election results. The Anti Trust Division of the Justice Department was concerned that NES would interpret the news instead of reporting it and they were promised by the promoters and founders of NES during mutual administrative correspondence that they would report the news and not interpret it. It was with this understanding that NES was granted the exemption by the Anti Trust Division, and I believe the exemption should be repealed. To the best of my knowledge and belief the Anti Trust Division never gave NES permission to interpret, alter or make up the news for the American people concerning national campaign and election results, and if they had given such consent it could easily be argued as unconstitutional and against the public's best interests, against the public's right to know, as it is clearly censorship and discriminative. Nonetheless, in the 1987 national elections and perhaps other elections they interpreted the news by determining what was news worthy or significant, they determined that all third party candidates such as the Libertarian party, the Populist

Party and the New Alliance Party were not news worthy. Though, thousands protested and requested that NES report the election results accurately beforehand their cry for accurate reporting or at least honest reporting was ignored. The method that NES used during the 1987 national elections were to divide equally the 3rd party election percentage results and then add them to the Republican and Democratic national election results totalling the results on the screen to equal 100%, with no further explanation, giving the viewing public the impression that there were no third (3rd) party election percentage results, and that all Americans voted for either the Democrats or Republicans. This is perhaps one of the saddest commentaries of the plight of the Public's Right to Know and the state of affairs of our media coverage of the American campaign/electoral process which censors public information and access to other national political candidates who wish to serve the American people. This policy of censorship and media bias cannot be argued as being in the public's best interests. Information on all national candidates is vitally important for the American voting public to be able to make a decision such as to whom to vote for locally and nationally. Not only are national candidates ignored during reporting of the election results they are equally ignored and censored from any media coverage by the major

networks as they are determined not to be of any interest or significance to the public.

For example: A New Alliance candidate whose name escapes me at the moment but who sued NES et al as he received approximately 40% of the election results in his district in New York but was not reported by NES, in 1987. Similarly the national Libertarian and Populist party candidates have been ignored. Most recently, the Republican Louisiana Candidate David Duke was not interviewed for his political platform but labeled a present kkk neo Nazi sympathizer, who was playing on the fears of the American public, the media failed to report that most people on welfare are whites and not blacks in Louisiana and that his anti welfare beliefs were not aimed toward his black constituents. Though, one disapproves of David Duke's past all candidates should be reported about in a balanced and objective uncensored, unbiased manner so as not to unnecessarily inflame and polarize the public. It is in the public's best interests to discuss or touch upon as thoroughly as possible the issues concerning voters, so that the reasons for supporting or not supporting policies and candidates can be discussed intelligently instead of emotionally. The media also did not allow David Duke much of a chance to voice and explain his views and when he attempted to do so was characterized as attempting to exploit the socio-economic fears of present day America.

No one in the media brought out that Mr. Duke has been making these statements and policy advocacies for many years now including during the 1987 national presidential elections when Mr. Duke by the way was considered not to be news worthy or significant according to NES when he ran under a populist platform, when the country was supposedly better off economically. The Gary Hart and Donald Trump extra marital affairs received more media time, money and attention than any 3rd party previously and currently received, including those candidates in the Republican and Democratic parties who are running a campaign contrary to the accepted political ideology of those currently in power. To add further insult to injury the Governmental Bureaus which disseminate election results to the public uses and is restricted to the NES election return results because they do not have a system of reporting the results to the public and so they in turn have elevated NES to a quasi governmental entity, creating another monopoly amidst a monopoly clearly violating our constitutional rights which interferes with our voting franchise.

In the local media reporting area it doesn't get much better either, Sylvester Turner a black Houston mayoral candidate was at the receiving end of a dirty smear campaign regarding unpaid bills that were exaggerated, his sexual bias was brought up and so on, at the eleventh

hour, and his black constituency which consisted of almost all if not all the blacks in Houston are outraged and are considering filing a complaint with the FCC against channel 13 the equivalent of channel 7 in the New York metro area. Whether or not these issues caused his loosing the election is debatable, but again the media spent much time on this personal smear about Mr. Turner and were unfortunately given much air time by the local network as grounds to disqualify Mr. Turner for Mayor.

Since the voting public cannot vote for individuals or political parties they have no knowledge of, and since television and cable is the most important and powerful communications medium today the public's choices and right to know are limited due to lack of coverage by the media. Domestic and foreign policy issues are not discussed in any great detail so that the public can understand how these potential polices/bills/laws/treaties will impact their constitutional rights and daily and future lives before supporting or refusing to support them. The public can only freely decide why and how to choose when given all the facts and the media has failed once again in this area. There was a CNN poll which claimed that only 1/3 of those polled knew what the bill of rights were. Is it not the media and network's responsibility to at some point report on the contents of our constitution and bill of rights? Or what about a documentary on the formation of

our constitution and bill of rights? Does it not make perfectly good sense for the public to know their rights and perhaps why these rights were given before they are asked to sacrifice them to the state because of a lack of creative problem solving on the part of those in power or for a political agenda that the public is unaware? So far the government has failed to remedy this situation. I pray that the FCC will attempt to remedy these and many similar injustices within its jurisdiction and disallow the major networks to expand their monopolies. In Holland all political parties are guaranteed equal and fair coverage regardless of the size or views of the party. In the US the few cable or only public service network television channels which have interviewed some 3rd party candidates (or what I call alternative Republican and Democratic candidates) do so on a limited basis, and they have failed to explore objectively and in depth the philosophy and roots of third parties, or the problems 3rd parties face in getting their political ideas out to the voting public which I believe is a very interesting and newsworthy story to be told. Unfortunately, the major networks believe that extra marital affairs and the sexual habits of famous people or candidates are more news worthy, or that they are good filler instead of intelligent news reporting on urgent and necessary issues like who is running for office and what that candidate has to say. The status quo mentality supported by the white

male majority which controls the network giants and for the most part cable to date will not allow diversity of individuals and ideas to flourish. Although, CNN is the best and most courageous news reporting to date. Hence, today even amongst the demand for more information we are rapidly growing toward a world much like that of George Orwell's 1984 where there are thought crimes, public ridicule and punishment for not having the accepted political thought of the brainwashed majority.

THE DANGER IN EXPANDING THE MAJOR NETWORK'S MARKET

5. Besides the reasoning above mentioned allowing the network giants a larger monopoly will severely damage the cable and video markets free enterprising system as well as create the same type of information and entertainment vacuum which is so prevalent in the major television network's programming to date. I believe they will also endanger the up and coming cable corporations which dared to risk everything to get into a new and struggling market, and that future middle class individuals male, female and minorities will be blocked from getting involved in the communications industry, which cable and the video markets through franchise and other opportunities offer, and would be impeded by the giant networks who are clearly on a search and destroy mission.
6. Since the media has a noble position and responsibility to our society, being the eyes and ears of the people and protecting hopefully our rights and welfare by accurate

news reporting it must be expected to strive for the highest ideals. The media must stop its love affair and co-dependency with the government and return to investigative, independent and accurate and honest reporting. The American and voting public depends on the media for such honesty as the television is the main source for information to date and the trends are that this use of the television will continue to grow and so we as a nation must use this medium wisely and with the highest of ethical standards, it is also by the way good business to do so and will prove to be profitable in the long run. I personally rather be upset with the truth than pacified with a lie, and I believe so would the American public, who is increasingly disinterested and cynical toward the government and by the media as well. The greatest role of television whether it is cable or the free access networks is to inform, to teach, to entertain and do so in a manner which does not contradict an ever changing free society. Competition brings out the best in individuals and the worst in those who lack ethics, concern for their product and the welfare of those in their market and there must be protective laws which eliminate monopolies as these have a destructive effect on all industry and a free society.

7. Turner Communications or any cable or public service network should not associate itself with NES as I feel this is a promotion of the News Election Service Monopoly,

unless NES chooses to report all third parties or at least returns to the time when at least it reported third parties as 'other' as it once did. I would challenge Turner Communications and other cable and public service networks to become more aggressive and independent in covering in covering third party national candidates and elections results and I believe that this will spark the interests and minds of many people who have lost interest in government and have lost faith in curing the social and economic ills of our country and indeed the world in which we live.

8. The major networks should be allowed to sell either directly or through an independent distributor/retailer the videos of their programming but that it should be strictly limited to that form of participation in the video market.
9. C-Span I and C-Span II should be on all basic cable programings that are offered as there are no national standards for basic cable and it varies greatly depending on the area. There should also be at least two cable companies allowed in any given area so that if dissatisfied a viewer can change to another cable company.
10. There should be a limit (with a grand father clause) of the number of cable networks owned by a single corporation, conglomerate or individual.
11. Lastly, there should be a cable station which is solely used equally by political candidates locally and

nationally so that these candidates can reach out to the voting and viewing public with their political ideas, information and solutions for the past, present and future problems confronting our society. When not being used for campaigning/election information dissemination it should be used to report on political, socio-economic and controversial information/issues which are not aired by the establishment media so that the American viewing and voting public can be well informed and make intelligent decisions about where we not the media or current government in power wants our country's future to lead, this will disallow special interest groups as well as the party's in power in our government from seizing control of our communications medium. It can be funded partly by the government and partly through choice via income tax returns, so that local and national candidates and those expressing alternative political ideology in their programming do not have to pay. This would relieve much of the corruption in government and help get the best and the real people's choice (when the people are informed) not the richest and most powerful into office.

Respectfully Submitted,

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cc: US House & Senate, Wash., DC
Justice Department Department-Anti Trust Division, Wash., DC
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